Rome 15th Decr. 1874

My dear Maria

'Twas very kind of you thinking of me on my birth day & writing such a nice letter on the occasion - altho I wrote to poor dear Tom on the same day, yet you merit an answer at once, tho' it cannot have much to entertain you, as I gave Tom all my news only a week ago

At this season arrive many letters of introduction & they bother my head for I have to call on all the persons & offer my services, which I find rather hard upon me - but as they are generally very superior people, so I am content & manage it all

Just now I have a charming letter from my illustrious f.d Wm Gladstone - the weather has not favorable to me & now we have gloom & damp & mud, perhaps as bad as yours

But here's one great improvement – Rome is kept as clean as a new pin & there are no longer any dunghills allowed – this has began to improve the health of the city & preserve life – then another great blessing is the new pavements in all directions. this helps my walking, for there were none before & this was one reason I could walk so much better in the country

A great storm is preparing gainst the Pope partly caused by Gladstones book but led on by the great German Chancellor. & I need not observe how that the Pope has plenty to answer for – so far he has lost all the governments of Europe – the crying sins are pride & ignorance – & leaving the people without education – Under this government the people are being well educated & show great talents & how great a sin it was to leave them in the dark

My painting begins to flag, partly owing to the dark days & partly owing to my not being able to encounter difficulties & changes, but no doubt I'll take to it again for my time passes heavily without it – But I get the English papers every day which is great gratification

Yet with all this damp & rain I have had no return of my rheumatism so I am indeed lucky & blessed at my age

The new comers all praise my large fine room & the great look of comfort – for I do every thing in it – I have my book, my piano forte, my paintings, my stove & my bed & you can have no idea how snug & comfortable I am – my picture I shut up at night & my fire is lighted before I get up – It is but just light at 7 & by ½ past 8 I sit down to breakfast & my newspaper – You praise my writing & I confess I am proud of it, for my hands are most sadly out of drawing & at one time I could not write

I am glad you praise my writing, for to me
surprising how my hand has recovered its strength
& steadiness, but I am sorry to say that my
painting languishes as I cannot shake off a certain
apathy or idleness (call it what you will) tho' I
need repose as I am still all soul—

My pictures unfinished stand around me like
starving children & reproach me with cruelty
but I hope to pick up as the spring advances

I think I have made up my mind not to go
to Tolfa this summer & more so as my Doctor tells
that he can medicate my bath to be exact to
that of Tolfa — for the Brigands & the vagabond
children are an annoyance too great for me
& also my house in Rome has every comfort, fine
air & great roominess — there I have my excellent
Doctor always near — I mean to eat out in the
early hour. — 'tis 9 years since I have summered in
Rome, tho' I always liked it & it likes me